***Copie Conforme*: Experiencing the Built Environment in an Age of Replication**

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In "If Venice Dies", Salvatore Settis argues that the communities formed by those who inhabit a city constitute an "invisible city", something like the soul that animates a body made up of buildings, streets and squares. In the case of Venice, the significant change in its population in the last few decades – from a few hundred thousand local inhabitants to millions and millions of tourists – may explain why the experience of visiting the city has changed drastically: even though its body may have been fairly preserved, the soul of the city has changed.

In the terms introduced by Martin Buber (1937), the experience of visiting Venice may have changed because many people – tourists, the tourism industry, local and national authorities, and many Venetians themselves – started to relate to the city as an "it", and not as a "thou". Philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that our age is characterized by this kind of “suppression of alterity”, which culminates in neural disorders such as "depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, borderline and burnout". Places like Venice may well be suffering from something similar.

In this paper, we will discuss possible ways to reinterpret the relation between the body and the soul of a building or city in the context of “hyper-modern cultural tourism” (Abreu, Malheiros, 2013). We will present a theoretical approach that focuses on the relation between identity and memory, arguing that objects – especially works of art and architecture – have a “memory content” that is expressed by its form, and that the encounter with such content through the form is what makes these objects not only valuable, but necessary to mankind (Abreu, 2007; Bartholo, 2009). We will then discuss how hyper-modern cultural tourism tends to replace this memory content, which is externalized by the (physical) presence of the monument, with an “image of memory”, transfiguring it into an image that can therefore be replicated (Flusser, 2011).

The following discussion will be focused on the example of the replicas of cities recently built in China (Bosker, 2013), which raises many questions regarding the role of architecture in what Flusser calls the “universe of technical images”. In this context, does it still make sense to think in terms of originals vs. copies? Could a less-crowded replica of Venice provide an experience that is actually closer to what people who visited the city before the age of mass tourism experienced? Could the replica recreate not just the built form, but also the kind of experience that made the city famous in the first place? Apart from these more provocative questions, could this discussion suggest the need to somehow preserve not only important buildings and their surroundings, but also the experience, the encounter with such meaningful spaces and objects? Would that be possible? This paper will address these and other questions, trying to establish a theoretical framework for further research into a more culturally sustainable approach to tourism.

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**Biographical presentations**

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